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Multi-Stakeholder dialogue on sustainable agriculture

Note by the Secretary-General

1. The eighth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development includes in its programme of work a multi-stakeholder dialogue focusing on agriculture as an economic sector. The dialogue will involve four key stakeholders — representatives of agri-business, trade unions from the agriculture sector, NGOs and farmers. In addition, the stakeholder delegations will include in their composition representatives of indigenous people, youth and scientists, and will be formed on the basis of gender balance.

2. This segment, like previous multi-stakeholder dialogue segments, has been prepared via a multi-stakeholder steering group composed of network organizations from the four key major group sectors, namely the International Agri-Food Network for business; the International Federation of Agricultural Producers and Via Campesina for farmers; the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (through the Trade Union Advisory Committee-Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the International Union of Food and Allied Workers' Associations) for workers; and the NGO Caucus on Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems for the non-governmental organizations. These network organizations facilitated the preparation of four discussion papers (E/CN.17/2000/3/Add.1-4), and consulted with their networks to identify and prepare their representatives to participate in the dialogue.

3. The multi-stakeholder dialogue on sustainable agriculture is composed of four sessions, focusing on the following specific themes:

Session 1. Choices in agricultural production techniques, consumption patterns and safety regulations: potentials and threats to sustainable agriculture (24 April, afternoon);

Session 2. Best practices in land resources management to achieve sustainable food cycles (24 April, evening);

Session 3. Knowledge for a sustainable food system: identifying and providing for education, training, knowledge-sharing and information needs (25 April, morning);

Session 4. Globalization, trade liberalization and investment patterns: economic incentives and framework conditions to promote sustainable agriculture (25 April, afternoon).

4. The first hour of each dialogue session will be allocated to short presentations by the major groups on the key issues and proposals from their perspectives, followed by brief reactions from Governments. The remainder of the session will be an open dialogue moderated by the Chairman of the Commission.

5. The multi-stakeholder dialogues became a standard part of the official work programme of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its sixth

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session, with the first dialogue segment focusing on the role of industry in sustainable development. The dialogue segment was launched in response to a decision by the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session (June 1997), in which the Assembly requested the Commission on Sustainable Development to strengthen its interaction with representatives of major groups, including through greater and better use of focused dialogue sessions (see Assembly resolution S-19/2, annex, para. 133 (e)). The dialogue segments launched in 1998 have since been recognized as a unique participatory model for effectively engaging major groups and Governments in a genuine dialogue on specific sustainable development issues.

6. The outcome of the multi-stakeholder dialogues is a Chairman's summary that is included in the final report of the Commission session. In addition, many proposals made and discussed in the multi-stakeholder dialogue segment are taken on board in the negotiated decision of the Commission on the topic of the dialogue, allowing for meaningful and direct contributions by stakeholder groups to the decisions and work of the Commission. A third important outcome of the dialogues is the multi-stakeholder follow-up programmes that they generate both within the work of the Commission and gradually in the work of other United Nations bodies.

7. Further dissemination of the multi-stakeholder model may be expected as a result of the dialogue segment on sustainable agriculture. The form and content of such possible outcomes are dependent on the proposals made by the major groups and the extent to which the Commission decides to include them in the final decisions on agriculture. Given the already recognized uniqueness and effectiveness of the model, the Commission may wish to consider and provide guidance on how it sees this model be further developed, disseminated and used in the upcoming 10-year review of the implementation of Agenda 21 in 2002, and in the post-2002 phase of sustainable development work.